

Rethinking the stereotypes

One woman's story of abuse



I don't really fit most people's stereotype of an abused woman.

I'm university educated. A respected professional and busy mom. From the outside looking in, it probably seemed I had it all: A successful husband, a beautiful home, great kids, my own career and interests, and a large network of close friends and family.

But from the inside looking out, my reality was much different.

At 22, just out of university, I married the man I loved. Smart and charming, he had a wry wit, sharp conversational abilities and a boyish, fun-loving nature.

He was also a bully; selfish and narcissistic, emotionally immature, quick to anger, and even quicker to yank his love and support out from under me if I didn't perform exactly as he wanted.

As an over-achiever who still struggles with self-esteem, I felt lucky he had chosen me. I convinced myself when he diminished me, yelled at me and called me unspeakable things, and defined me by my mistakes and many flaws he was trying to help me be a better person. I believed him when he said it was all my fault. That if I would only do or say things differently he wouldn't be forced to act the way he did.

So I tried harder. I read books. I went to counseling. I planned outings and trips, and tried to focus on meeting his needs and being the wife and mother he needed me to be.

"Marriage isn't easy. You have to work at it," I told myself after one more night of crying myself to sleep and wondering how the man who loved me could treat me like so much garbage on the street.

Twenty-one years after I married him, in the midst of yet another of his uncontrolled rages, the word "abuse" popped into my head. It was my proverbial light bulb moment.

I began researching emotional and verbal abuse, amazed to find my story recounted in article after article, book after book. I was not alone. I was not crazy. And, I decided, I was not going to take it anymore – not for me and not for my children.

The Kelowna Women's Shelter and its incredible team were my lifesaver. Although I didn't need a place to stay, they provided invaluable advice and a safe place to share my story and fears.

The Shelter's team of dedicated staff and volunteers supported me in making the most difficult and life-changing decision of my life, and I am forever grateful. I am healthier and happier than I have ever been. I sleep nights and no longer walk on eggshells in my home. I am a better mom, a better friend, and a better person. I am living the life I deserve and discovering each day what true love and joy really are.

Submitted by a former client

Kelowna Women's Shelter provides emergency and transitional housing, food, clothing, counselling, advocacy, and education to women and their children who have experienced intimate partner violence and abuse. Their services are confidential and free.

To learn more, call 250-763-1040 24 hrs/day, or visit www.kelownawomensshelter.ca